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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to gather five categories of data on acquisitions librarians in academic libraries: which libraries employ them; their managerial status; their goals; the satisfaction they derive from their work and positions; and their influence on library policies. Two surveys, "Role of the Acquisitions Librarian in University and College Libraries" and "Acquisition Processes in Small University and College Libraries," were sent nationwide to 312 college and university libraries. Fifty-three percent responded with valid questionnaires. Principal findings revealed that: (1) five distinct classes of libraries could be identified and ranked--research, strong, good, acceptable, and marginal; (2) the position of acquisitions librarian is more prevalent at higher ranked libraries; (3) a significant percentage of good and acceptable libraries have combined the collection development manager's position with that of head of the acquisitions department; (4) non-librarian managers in strong libraries devote their efforts to running the acquisitions department, while managers at acceptable and marginal levels are also engaged in other work; (5) the number of non-managerial acquisitions librarians increases with the lower ranked libraries; (6) job satisfaction and ultimate professional goals in the position of acquisitions librarian increase with each reduction in library class; and (7) a large percentage of acquisitions librarians greatly influence decision-making. (CGD)

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THE ACQUISITIONS LIBRARIAN IN ACADEMIC LIBRARIES

STANLEY A. SHABOWICH

OBJECTIVES

The aim of this study is to establish the following regarding the Acquisitions Librarians: 1) which academic libraries employ them, 2) their managerial status, 3) their goals, 4) the satisfaction they derive from their work and positions, 5) how influential they are.

BACKGROUND - PROBLEM

The librarians who do research invariably seem to select concerns that deal with processes, systems, formulas, library service statistics, various models, collection development methods, and the like - but not with librarians' positions.

Very few studies have been devoted to the study of librarians' professional duties and responsibilities in the context of their respective positions. The library literature has a dearth to offer in this area. Usually one has to rely on empirical sources in one's own library to surmise the duties and resposibilities of one's peers whose specialization is different from one's own. In such circumstances, it is possible to develop a dim picture of the skills, duties and responsibilities of peers. More important, adequate literature is not available to establish with certainty the national norm for one's own specialty.

Late in 1984, I decided to draw some comparisons between my own position and positions of other Head Acquisitions Librarians. To my disappointment the library literature had little to offer. (1) I had two choices: either to abandon my project, or to obtain answers to my questions directly from librarians. I chose the latter course.

METHODOLOGY

Two questionnaires were prepared for this purpose. They were: 1) "Role of Acquisitions Librarian in University and College Libraries," (2) and 2) "Acquisition Processes in Small University and College Libraries." (3) A national survey of college and university libraries was conducted. A systematic sample technique was used. The schools were picked from the alphabetical list in the "index" section of the "Narrative Descriptions" volume of the College Blue Book. (4) A total of 312 questionnaires were mailed. A questionnaire was intended for the Acquisitions Librarian, if there was one. In a library where there was no Acquisition Librarian, the position performing the duties of an

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Acquisitions Librarian, or one that was directing/administrating operations of the department was expected to fill out the questionnaire. Fifty-three percent returned valid questionnaires. The percentage of returns for the five ranked groups of libraries was as follows:

Libraries	Number of Responses	Percentage of Responses
Research	28	60.9
Strong	21	45.7
Good	28	59.6
Acceptable	38	43.2
Marginal	47	55.3

It was obvious to me from the very start that the libraries of the respondents had to be ranked. As the returns began to arrive, several classes of libraries emerged. It was of the utmost importance to identify distinct classes of libraries and to sort the returns accordingly. Five distinct classes of libraries were identified. They are in hierarchical order as follows: 1) Research, 2) Strong, 3) Good, 4) Acceptable and 5) Marginal. The task of identifying the Research libraries presented no difficulties. I used the Association of Research Libraries' membership list to establish their identity. (5) The Research libraries were ranked at the top. Considerable effort was required to rank the other libraries, as there must be a relationship established between an academic library and the needs of the institution the library is serving. The strength of an academic library can not be established alone on its own merits. The school's enrollment and the degrees it offers are very important considerations. These variables must be considered. Consequently, libraries serving some of the nation's top undergraduate schools were ranked by me as "Strong." However, an excellent library serving a prestigious undergraduate school would not be able to satisfactorily meet the needs of a large university. If such a transposition had taken place, the library involved would have been rated lower.

Judging a library on its own merits, a number of factors were considered. These were: 1) number of librarians employed, 2) number of support staff (clerical, "nonprofessional" and "paraprofessional") employed, 3) size of the library's budget and 4) number of periodical subscriptions. Since my questionnaires did not cover these components, the American Library Directory was used to provide the answers. (6) Criteria was established for the five library ranks. The libraries were assigned a rank according to the established criteria. Median values of the criteria for the ranked libraries are given in Table 1.

TABLE 1

MEDIAN VALUES FOR PERSONNEL, BUDGET AND SURVEYED PERIODICAL SUBSCRIPTIONS OF THE RNNKED LIBRARIES

Library	Librarian Median	Support Staff Median	Budget Median	Periodical Subscriptions Median
Research	NA	NA	NA	NA
Strong	31	52	2,850,000	6,900
Good	18	30	1,650,000	3,000
Acceptable	8.5	17.5	594,000	1,350
Marginal	4.1	5.1	252,000	689

Tabulated from: American Library Directory, 2 vols. 38th ed. (New York: R. R. Bowker Co., 1985).

STRONG LIBRARIES

Human resources are extremely important to the mission of any academic library. I have selected from the returns for the Strong Library class only those libraries that are superbly staffed. Attention was given to both the professional and support staffs. For this group a return with 15 librarians represents the bottom of the scale. However, this low number of professionals was offset, to a considerable extent, by the library's high clerical-to-librarian ratio - 4.5 clerks to one librarian. At the top of the scale, one library had 52 librarians and 113 support personnel (clerks). The median librarian count for the Strong Library group was 31; while the median count of support personnel was 52. The lowest and the highest budgets for this group are $1,400,000 and $5,400,000, respectively. The considerable spread is due to the degrees the two schools offer and the size of their respective enrollment. The library with the $1.4 million budget serves a school that offers only Bachelor degrees. This school has an enrollment of just over 1000. The library with $5.4 million budget serves a university that offers several doctoral programs. It's enrollment is over 23,000. The median library budget for this group is $2,850,000. The periodical subscriptions median for this group is 6,900 titles.(7)

GOOD LIBRARIES

For the Good Libraries, a librarian staff of 8 represents the bottom of the scale, while a roster of 34 librarians at another school represents the top of the scale. The median librarian count for this class of libraries stands at 18. For the support personnel, 11 employees represent the low end of the scale, and 88 employees represent the high end of the scale, median being 30. The lowest and the highest budgets for this group are $750,000 and $2,850,000, respectively. The median budget is $1,650,000. The periodical subscriptions median for this group of libraries is 3,000 titles. As in the case of Strong Libraries, the size of the enrollment and degree progams were considered. Libraries were assigned to this group with these considerations in mind.(8)

ACCEPTABLE LIBRARIES

This is a rather large group of libraries ranging from those serving small four-year liberal arts colleges to those serving under-financed universities, in some cases, with enrollment over 10,000. Personally, I believe that a library must employ a minimum of six fulltime librarians, even at a smallest college or university. A number lower than six is indicative of corner cutting by a school in the area of library services to its students and faculty. Despite my conviction, I have included in the Acceptable group some libraries with less than six librarians. These exceptions were made because the libraries have in their employ unusually large numbers of support personnel, which is a compensating factor to a degree. The librarian median for this group is 8.5. The support staff median is 17.5. The budget median is $594,000, and the periodical subscriptions median is 1,350 titles.(9)

MARGINAL LIBRARIES

The Marginal Libraries group is the fifth and the last group of academic libraries to be considered here. A large number of academic libraries belong to this group. Professional schools were excluded from all samples. I have also excluded from the marginal group, libraries with a budget of under $100,000. There are two librarians per library on the lower end of the scale, and 15 on the upper end for this group. Support staff range extends from the low of one per library to a high of 28. The librarian median is 4.1, and the support staff median is 5.1. A few libraries with relatively high personnel numbers were relegated to the Marginal Library group for the reason of grossly inadequate library material budgets. The condition may be a temporary one for some schools. The budget range was wide - with the low of $100,000 and the high of $1,376,000. However, there were only two samples with budgets of over the $1,000,000 mark. The two schools with library budgets exceeding one million dollars have high enrollment and offer a considerable number of doctoral programs - the main reasons for their Marginal Library group rating.(10)

WHERE EMPLOYED

The Acquisitions Librarian is not a fixture at all academic libraries. Table 2 attests to that.

TABLE 2

MANAGERS OF ACQUISITIONS DEPARTMENTS

Library	Head, Acquisitions Librarian		Collection Development and Head, Acquisitions Department		Head, Technical Services		Director of Library		Head Cataloger		Others		Sample Size
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.
Research	27	96	1	4	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	28
Strong	17	74	1	4	3	13	-	-	-	-	2	9	23
Good	17	61	6	21	5	18	-	-	-	-	-	-	28
Acceptable	10	28.8	7	20	10	28.8	3	8.5	1	2.9	4	11	35
Marginal	6	13	-	-	12	27	22	49	-	-	5	11	45

Source: Stanley A. Shabowich, Role of Acquisitions Librarian in University and College Libraries, questionnaire, p. 6, question 7.1, Pan American University, Edinburg, Texas 78539, winter, 1985.

Stanley A. Shabowich, Acquisition Processes in Small University and College Libraries, questionnaire, p. 6, question 7.1, Pan American University, Edinburg, Texas 78539, winter,1985.

As one would expect, the position of Acquisitions Librarian is far more prevalent at higher ranked libraries. Ninety-six percent of the United States research libraries employ Acquisitions Librarians in a management capacity. The remaining 4% have combined the position of Collection Development Manager and Head Acquisitions Librarian into one position. The percentage of libraries employing Acquisitions

Librarians drops with each descending library rank. The percentage figures for the remaining four classes of libraries are as follows: Strong - 74, Good - 61, Acceptable - 28.8 and Marginal - 13. A significant percent of Good and Acceptable Libraries have combined the Collection Development Manager's position with that of Head, Acquisitions Department. Beginning with the Strong Libraries, there are situations where at some libraries Head of Technical Services is directly managing the Acquisitions Department. At the Acceptable Library level, the Library Director comes into prominence as the manager of acquisition operations. The Library Director is his/her own Acquisitions Librarian at 49% of Acceptable rank libraries.(11)

The "other" column in the chart, for the most part, consists of non-librarian managers. At the "Strong" library level their efforts are entirely devoted to the running of the Acquisitions Department. At the "Acceptable" and "Marginal" levels these managers are also engaged in other work. In fact, at the latter two levels these Acquisitions managers devote, by far, more of their work time to other library activities. A simmilar situation exists where the Head of Technical Services manages the Acquisitions Unit. Neither of these two positions devotes a great deal of time to the management of the Acquisitions Unit. In most cases, at the Acceptable and Marginal class levels, the Library Director is primarily interested in book selection and collection management.(12)

MANAGERIAL STATUS

The surveys also established managerial status of Acquisitions Librarians. Table 3 provides the results.

TABLE 3

WHERE ACQUISITIONS LIBRARIAN IS OR IS NOT
CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER OF THE
ACQUISITIONS DEPARTMENT/UNIT

Library	Is		Is Not		Sample Size
	No.	%	No.	%	No.
Research	27	100	-	-	27
Strong	17	100	-	-	17
Good	17	94	1*	6	18
Acceptable	10	91	1*	9	11
Marginal	6	75	2*	25	8

* Head of Technical Services manages the Acquisitions Department -- not the Acquisitions Librarian.

Sources: Shabowich, Role of the Acquisitions Librarian, p. 6, question 7.1.

Shabowich, Acquisition Processes, p. 6, question 7.1.

It is clear that in an overwhelming number of cases the Acquisitions Librarian is also the manager of the Acquisitions Department/Unit. There are some exceptions to this practice. The exceptions do not apply to the Research and Strong Libraries. They exist on the remaining three levels. The exceptions constitute a six and nine percent for the Good and Acceptable Libraries, respectively. However, they are significantly higher for the Marginal rated libraries, comprising a 25% figure.(13)

Of course, the greater incidence of non-managerial Acquisitions Librarians as one goes down the ladder is predictable. Also predictable is the fact that in these instances, the Head of Technical Services is one who takes over from the Acquisitions Librarian the management of an Acquisitions Department/Unit. The survey did not attempt to establish a reason for the phenomenon.

However,when such managerial arrangement occurs, library efficiency suffers. In a situation of this nature, it is doubtful that the library involved needs a Head of Technical Services. If it does need one, then, in the name of fairness and library efficiency, the affected subordinate should be transferred out of Technical Services to another department, where he/she could have an opportunity to grow professionally and to make a meaningful contribution to the library.(14)

ACQUISITIONS LIBRARIANS' SHORT RANGE GOALS

The survey produced some interesting results concerning job satisfaction. Table 4 gives the results for Acquisitions Librarians in all five classes of libraries.

TABLE 4

ACQUISITIONS LIBRARIANS WHO WOULD/WOULD NOT SWITCH TO OTHER POSITIONS IF THEY WERE OFFERED OPPORTUNITY TO DO SO AT THIS TIME

Library	Would		Would Not		Sample Size
	No.	%	No.	%	No.
Research	15	53.6	13	46.4	28
Strong	7	43.8	9	56.2	16
Good	6	33.3	12	66.7	18
Acceptable	3	33.3	6	66.7	9
Marginal	1	12.5	7	87.5	8

Source: Shabowich, Role of Acquisitions Librarian, p. 8, questions 8.5, 8.6, 8.7, 8.8.

Shabowich, Acquisition Processes, p. 7, questions 8.2, 8.3.

As can be seen from the Table, 53.6% of Acquisitions Librarians at Research Libraries would switch to other positions if they were offered opportunity to do so. This is the highest figure for any of the five library groups. Also, this group is the only one amongst the five where over 50% of Acquisitions Librarians would prefer other work. The percentage figures of those who would choose to exit the Acquisitions Department progressively diminishes with each reduction in the library class. Thus at the Marginal Library level, only 12.5% would switch to another position. It seems to me, job satisfaction is not synonymous with prestigeous libraries, at least not for the Acquisitions Librarian.(15)

ACQUISITIONS LIBRARIANS' ULTIMATE PROFESSIONAL GOALS

Not all Acquisitions Librarians plan to finish their careers in that capacity. As Table 5 indicates, a majority of Acquisitions Librarians have other library positions in mind for their ultimate professional goal. Only 35.7% of the Acquisitions Librarians in the Research Libraries group are content with their fate. They do not envision a library career change. Conversely, an impressive 50% of Acquisitions Librarians working for Good Libraries have attained their ultimate library career goal.(16)

TABLE 5

ACQUISITIONS LIBRARIANS' ULTIMATE PROFESSIONAL GOALS

Library	A		B		C		D		E		F		G		H		I		J		K		Sample Size
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.
Research	10	35.7	5	17.9	4	14.3	3	10.7	1	3.6	-	-	2	7.1	3	10.7	-	-	-	-	-	-	28
Strong	8	42	1	5.3	1	5.3	3	15.8	-	-	1	5.3	1	5.3	4	21	-	-	-	-	-	-	19
Good	8	50	2	12.5	1	6.2	1	6.2	1	6.3	2	12.5	-	-	1	6.3	-	-	-	-	-	-	16
Acceptable	4	36.4	2	18.2	1	9.1	1	9.1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	9.1	1	9.1	1	9	11
Marginal	3	42.9	-	-	-	-	-	-	-		1	14.3	-	-	2	28.6	1	14.2	-	-	-	-	7

Letter Keys:

A - Acquisitions Librarian
B - Director of Library
C - Collection Development Manager
D - Technical Services, Head
E - Public Services, Head
F - Reference Librarian
G - Job Satisfaction
H - Survival Until Retirement
I - Teaching Library Science
J - Special Collections Librarian
K - Associate Library Director

Source: Shabowich, Role of Acquisitions Librarian, p. 8, question 8.9.
---------, Acquisition Processes, p. 7, question 8.6.

SATISFACTION DERIVED BY ACQUISITIONS LIBRARIANS FROM ACQUISITIONS WORK AND THEIR POSITIONS

Notwithstanding their long range goals, most Acquisitions Librarians derive a high degree of satisfaction from their work. The findings are given in Table 6. However, few Acquisitions Librarians are satisfied with their positions, as indicated in Table 7.(17)

TABLE 6

SATISFACTION DERIVED FROM ACQUISITION WORK
BY ACQUISITIONS LIBRARIANS

Library	Very Little (1)		Some (2)		Quite A Bit (3)		A Very Great Deal (4)		Sum of Columns (3 & 4)	Sample Size
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	%	No.
Research	-	-	2	7	10	37	15	56	93	27
Strong	-	-	-	-	6	37	10	63	100	16
Good	1	6	-	-	6	33	11	61	94	18
Acceptable	1	8	1	8	7	59	3	25	84	12
Marginal	-	-	1	11	5	56	3	33	89	9

Source: Shabowich, Role of Acquisitions Librarian, p. 8, question 8.5.

Shabowich, Acquisition Processes, p. 7, question 8.2.

TABLE 7

SATISFACTION DERIVED BY ACQUISITIONS LIBRARIANS FROM PRESENT POSITIONS

Library	Very Little (1)		Some (2)		Quite A Bit (3)		A Very Great Deal (4)		Sum of Columns (3 &4)	Sample Size
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	%	No.
Research	1	4	2	7	10	37	14	52	89	27
Strong	2	13	-	-	5	31	9	56	87	16
Good	1	6	-	-	9	50	8	44	94	18
Acceptable	1	8	2	17	1	8	8	67	75	12
Marginal	-	-	2	22	4	44	3	34	78	9

Source: Shabowich, Role of Acquisitions Librarian, p. 8, question 8.6.

Shabowich, Acquisition Processes, p. 7, question 8.3.

It is clear that a very high percentage of Acquisitions Librarians enjoy their work, and most of them are comfortable in their positions. A relatively small percentage of Acquisitions Department/Unit Heads are not comfortable in their positions. A very few do not enjoy their work.(18)

It's hardly a coincidence that librarians holding other administrative library positions enjoy their concurrent role as heads Acquisitions Departments. According to the results of my surveys, most library directors and lesser administrators who are managing Acquisitions Departments would not change these arrangements. The surveys' findings are presented in Table 8.(19)

TABLE 8

SATISFACTION DERIVED FROM MANAGEMENT OF ACQUISITIONS DEPARTMENT/UNIT BY LIBRARIANS HOLDING OTHER POSITIONS

Library	Very Little		Some		Quite A Bit		A Very Great Deal		Sample Size
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.
Research	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Strong	-	-	-	-	2D	40	2D	40	5
	-	-	-	-	1E	20	-	-	
Good	-	-	-	-	1B	11	1A	11	9
	-	-	-	-	-	-	4B	45	
	-	-	-	-	-	-	1C	11	
	-	-	-	-	-	-	2D	22	
Acceptable	-	-	1B	5	1B	5	3A	15	20
	-	-	-	-	1C	5	3B	15	
	-	-	-	-	3E	15	1C	5	
	-	-	-	-	1F	5	5D	25	
	-	-	-	-	-	-	1E	5	
Marginal	-	-	3A	8	10A	27	13A	35	37
	-	-	2D	5	3D	8	1C	3	
	-	-	-	-	-	-	5D	14	

Letter Keys:
- A - Director of Library
- B - Collection Development Manager
- C - Associate Director
- D - Associate Director for Technical Services
- E - Non-Librarian Personnel
- F - Head Cataloger

Source: Shabowich, Role of Acquisitions Librarian

Shabowich, Acquisition Processes.

The findings indicate that an overwhelming majority of administrators are not engaged in acquisitions work from necessity, but rather by choice.(20)

INFLUENCE

Table 9 indicates the extent of Acquisitions Librarians' influence in a decision making process of libraries. The sample does not include Heads of Technical Services who directly manage Acquisitions Departments/Units. Supervisors of acquisition operations who are not librarians also have been excluded from this Table. Both Collection Development Librarians and those with a joint title of Collection Development manager and Acquisitions Librarian were excluded from this Table.(21)

The Marginal Library class sample presented in Table 9 is small. It constitutes 17% of respondents. The reason for this is that the position of Acquisitions Librarian exists at a very few of these libraries. As a rule, Library Director or Technical Services Librarian manage acquisition operations.(22)

TABLE 9

ACQUISITIONS LIBRARIANS' INFLUENCE IN THE DECISION MAKING PROCESS OF LIBRARIES

Library	Very Little (1)		Some (2)		Quite A Bit (3)		A Very Great Deal (4)		Sum of Columns (3 & 4)	Sample Size
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	%	No.
Research	1	3.6	12	42.8	10	35.7	5	17.9	53.6	28
Strong	1	6	6	35	7	41	3	18	59	17
Good	3	14	4	18	10	45	5	23	68	22
Acceptable	-	-	6	33	8	45	4	22	67	18
Marginal	-	-	4	50	4	50	-	-	50	8

Source: Shabowich, Role of Acquisitions Librarian, p. 8, question 8.3.

Shabowich, Acquisition Processes.

A lesser percentage of Acquisitions Librarians have negligable to slight influence on their respective library's decision making processes. A total of 46.4% of the Research Library class respondents selected the "very little" and "some" choices.(23)

TABLE 10

ACQUISITIONS LIBRARIANS AND LIBRARY MANAGEMENT TEAMS

Library	On the Team		Not on the Team		Sample Size
	No.	%	No.	%	No.
Research	18	64	10	36	28
Strong	12	71	5	29	17
Good	17	74	6	26	23
Acceptable	14	78	4	22	18
Marginal	3	38	5	62	8

Source: Shabowich, Role of Acquisitions Librarian, p. 7, question 8.1.

Shabowich, Acquisition Processes, p. 7, question 8.1.

With the exception of the Marginal Library class, a high percentage of Acquisitions Librarians are part of library management teams. These findings are reported above in Table 10. However, if one were to compare Tables 9 and 10, one would see that some members of the management team have little influence in the decision making processes of their libraries. Of course, this should be expected.(24)

SUMMARY

Of course, this is a fact-finding inquiry devoted solely to personnel, particularly to the position of Head Acquisitions Librarian. The surveys' findings reveal considerable differences in staffing practices among the five classes of libraries -- Research, Strong, Good, Acceptable and Marginal. One sees that the incidence of the position of Acquisitions Librarian diminishes significantly with each library class down the scale.(25)

Also the article reports findings of the surveys on the managerial status of Acquisitions Librarians in the five classes of libraries. Where acquisitions operations are not being managed by an Acquisitions Librarian, the position that manages them is identified.

In addition, the inquiry reveals that an overwhelming majority of Acquisitions Librarians enjoy their work. Fewer of them are satisfied with their positions. However, the satisfaction rate is quite high for the latter. Notwithstanding, a majority of Acquisitions Librarians aspire to other library positions.

The inquiry also revealed that a substantial percentage of Acquisitions Librarians have considerable influence on the library decision making processes.

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